

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

The following listing of claims replaces all prior versions, and all prior listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1.-8. (Cancelled).

9. (Currently Amended) Fiber-containing material made from a plurality of multi-component fibers, each multi-component fiber including at least first and second segments, the first and second segments being made respectively of a first polymer material and a second polymer material, the first polymer material having a higher melt temperature than that of the second polymer material, the second segments having been melted and being a binder of the fiber-containing material, the first and second segments having been at least partially split from each other prior to melting of the second segments, wherein the fiber-containing material has cross-over points of the first segments with each other, where the first segments cross each other, wherein the second polymer material, of the second segments, is substantially only at the cross-over points where the first segments cross each other, and wherein the multi-component fibers have a size of at most 1 denier per fiber (dpf), and wherein the fiber-containing material is a web or fabric by itself.

10. (Cancelled).

11. (Original) Fiber-containing material according to claim 9, wherein the material is a non-woven fabric.

12. (Previously Amended) Fiber-containing material according to claim 11, wherein the non-woven fabric has a weight of 0.3 to 40 ounces per square yard.
13. (Original) Fiber-containing material according to claim 9, wherein the second segments have been completely melted in forming the material.
14. (Original) Fiber-containing material according to claim 9, wherein the second polymer material, forming the second segments, is the sole binder of the fiber-containing material.
15. (Previously Amended) Fiber-containing material according to claim 9, wherein the multi-component fibers are microfibers.
16. (Original) Fiber-containing material according to claim 9, wherein a difference between the melt temperature of the first polymer material and the melt temperature of the second polymer material is at least 100°C.
17. (Original) Fiber-containing material according to claim 9, wherein the first polymer material has a melt temperature in a range of 125°-450°C, and the second polymer material has a melt temperature of 60°-300°C.
18. (Original) Fiber-containing material according to claim 9, wherein the second segments have been only partially split from the first segments.

19. (Original) Fiber-containing material according to claim 18, wherein the first and second segments are segments that have been split due to differential shrinkage thereof, the segments being self-bulking due to the differential shrinkage.

20. (Previously Amended) Fiber-containing material according to claim 9, wherein the second segments have been completely split from the first segments prior to melting of the second segments.

21. (Original) Fiber-containing material according to claim 9, wherein the fibers are staple fibers.

22.-23. (Cancelled)

24. (Original) Fiber-containing material according to claim 9, wherein the material is selected from the group consisting of a hydroentangled fabric, a spunbonded fabric, a wet-laid fabric, an air-laid nonwoven web, a needlepunched nonwoven web and a card web.

25. (Original) A filter comprising the fiber-containing material of claim 9.

26. (Original) A wiping cloth comprising the fiber-containing material of claim 9.

27. (Original) Synthetic leather comprising the fiber-containing material of claim 9.

28. (Original) Synthetic suede comprising the fiber-containing material of claim 9.

29. (Previously Presented) Fiber-containing material according to claim 9, wherein the first polymer material is selected from the group consisting of polyethylene terephthalate, polylactic acid, poly-cyclohexylene dimethylene terephthalate, and polyamides, and the second polymer material is selected from the group consisting of high density polyethylene, linear low density polyethylene, polypropylene, polylactic acid, the first and second polymer materials being selected such that the melt temperature of the first polymer material is higher than that of the second polymer material.

30. (Currently Amended) Fiber-containing material made from a plurality of multi-component fibers, each multi-component fiber including at least first and second segments, the first and second segments being made respectively of a first polymer material and a second polymer material, the first polymer material having a higher melt temperature than that of the second polymer material, the first segments of the plurality of multi-component fibers having cross-over points with each other, where the first segments cross each other, wherein second polymer material, of the second segments, has been melted and is substantially only at the cross-over points where the first segments cross each other, to act as a binder of the fiber-containing

material, and wherein the multi-component fibers have a size of at most 1 denier per fiber (dpf), and wherein the fiber-containing material is a web or fabric by itself.

31.-61. (Cancelled).

62. (Previously Presented) Fiber-containing material according to claim 9, wherein the second polymer material, of the second segments, substantially encapsulates said cross-over points and is substantially only at said cross-over points.

63. (Cancelled).

64. (Previously Presented) Fiber-containing material according to claim 9, wherein the first and second segments have been at least partially split by differential shrinkage of the first and second polymer materials.

65. (Previously Presented) Fiber-containing material according to claim 9, the second segments having been melted and the first polymer material, of the first segments, not having been melted.

66. (Previously Presented) Fiber-containing material according to claim 9, wherein the difference in melt temperature between the first polymer material and the second polymer material is in the range of 10°-250°C.

67. (Currently Amended) Fiber-containing material, which is a web or fabric by itself, and which is made by a process comprising the steps of:

collecting a plurality of multi-component fibers, the multi-component fibers having at least first segments and second segments respectively made of first and second polymer materials, the first polymer material having a higher melt temperature than that of the second polymer material, the multi-component fibers having a size of at most 1 denier per fiber (dpf);

splitting the second segments at least partially from the first segments; and
after said splitting, thermally bonding the first segments, to form the fiber-containing material, by melting the second polymer material of the second segments,

wherein in the collecting step, the plurality of multi-component fibers form cross-over points with each other, and in the thermal bonding step the second polymer material of the second segments is melted so as to encapsulate the first segments at cross-over points of the first segments, the first segments crossing each other at the cross-over points of the first segments after the thermal bonding, and

wherein after the thermal bonding the second polymer material of the second segments is substantially only at the cross-over points of the first segments, where the first segments cross each other.

68. (Previously Presented) Fiber-containing material according to claim 67, wherein the second polymer material is the only bonding agent thermally bonding the first segments.

69. (Previously Presented) Fiber-containing material according to claim 67, wherein in the thermal bonding the second polymer material of the second segments is melted without melting the first polymer material of the first segments.

70.-71. (Cancelled)

72. (Previously Presented) Fiber-containing material according to claim 67, wherein the multi-component fibers each contains 4-100 segments and is in a range of 0.7-100 deniers per filament, and after splitting the segments are in a range of 0.01-20 deniers per filament.

73. (Previously Presented) Fiber-containing material according to claim 9, wherein the first and second polymer materials are different types of polymer materials.

74. (Previously Presented) Fiber-containing material according to claim 30, wherein the first and second polymer materials are different types of polymer materials.

75. (Previously Presented) Fiber-containing material according to claim 67, wherein the first and second polymer materials are different types of polymer materials.

76. (Previously Presented) Fiber-containing material according to claim 30, wherein the second polymer material has been completely melted and is substantially only at the cross-over points where the first segments cross each other.

77. (Currently Amended) Fiber-containing material according to claim 67, wherein, in the step of thermally bonding the first segments, the second polymer material of the second segments is ~~completed~~ completely melted.

78. (Previously Presented) Fiber-containing material according to claim 30, wherein the second polymer material, of the second segments, substantially encapsulates said cross-over points and is substantially only at said cross-over points.

79. (Previously Presented) Fiber-containing material according to claim 9, wherein, after the at least partially splitting the first and second segments from each other, to form post-split fibers, the post-split fibers have dpf values less than that of the multi-component fibers, and as low as 0.01 dpf.

80. (Previously Presented) Fiber-containing material according to claim 20, wherein after completely splitting the first and second segments from each other, to form post-split fibers, the post-split fibers have dpf values less than that of the multi-component fibers, and as low as 0.01 dpf.

81. (Previously Presented) Fiber-containing material made from a plurality of multi-component fibers, each multi-component fiber including at least first and second segments, the first and second segments being made respectively of a first polymer material and a second polymer material, the first polymer material having a higher melt temperature than that of the second polymer material, the second segments having been melted and being a binder of the fiber-containing material, the first and second segments having been at least partially split from each other prior to melting of the second segments, wherein the fiber-containing material has cross-over points of the first segments with each other, where the first segments cross each other, wherein the second polymer material, of the second segments, is substantially only at the cross-over points where the first segments cross each other, and wherein the fiber-containing material is a yarn.

82. (New) Fiber-containing material according to claim 67, consisting essentially of the multi-component fibers processed by said process.